

Research Notes

THE INSECTS OF "ALMENDRON, PRUNUS OCCIDENTALIS SW.¹

The "Almendrón" of Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Cuba, *Prunus occidentalis* Swartz, is an endemic tree of the mountainous areas of both the Greater and the Lesser Antilles. The smooth-skinned, dark-purplish fruit is shaped like a small prune, which in Puerto Rico matures in mid-June. Although edible, it is hardly to be recommended for human consumption as all collected locally have been heavily infested with the maggots of the fruitfly, *Anastrepha suspensa* Loew. This is the fruitfly which, at lower elevations, attacks the fruit of guava, pomarrosa, the husks of almendro, and overripe grapefruit and oranges. In Martinique, a liqueur is prepared from the fruit of the almendrón: the locally celebrated "Noyau."²

The economic importance of the almendrón does not depend on its fruit, but on its wood, which although not adapted for use outdoors exposed to the weather, is hard and durable and is more resistant than the heartwood of genuine West Indian mahogany, *Swietenia mahagoni* Jacq., to the attack of the "polilla," *Cryptotermes brevis* Walker.³ So few are the timbers of Puerto Rico which are more resistant than mahogany to the dry-wood termite, that each one merits especial attention.

The entomologists have been making observations on a nursery of trees discarded by the U. S. Forest Service and now 6 to 9 feet tall, located below the swimming pool of the Doña Juana Recreation Area of the Toro Negro Unit. Almendrón trees are not outstandingly conspicuous, either individually or en masse, and the plain oval leaves vary so considerably in size as not to be distinctive. Rarely one may find on an otherwise uninjured leaf what looks like a spot of undried paint, its surface somewhat interrupted by scattered pustules. Submitted to John A. Stevenson of the Plant Disease Epidemics and Identification Section of USDA at Beltsville, Md., this unique fungus was identified by Wm. W. Diehl as *Rhytisma leptospilum* Berk. et Curt. Unfortunately, it is not merely a very interesting mycological specimen, for José Marrero a few months ago found it attacking not only leaves, but twigs and stems of seedlings in a nursery at higher elevations.

A most beautiful vaquita, black-striped with iridescent scales of blue-

¹ Presented at the Autumn Meeting, American Society of Agricultural Sciences, held at Isabela, P. R., Nov. 18, 1955.

² Record, Samuel J., and Hess, Robert W., (p. 452), *Timbers of the New World*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1941.

³ Wolcott, George N., A list of woods arranged according to their resistance to the attack of the West Indian dry-wood termite, *Cryptotermes brevis* Walker, *Caribbean Forester* 7 (4) 329-36, 1946.

green, of which a single female was found ovipositing between coffee leaves at Maricao in 1921, was described in *Insectae Portoricensis*⁴ as *Compsus maricao* Wolcott, and for some years constituted the only individual known. Since observations were started on the nursery of almendrón trees at Doña Juana, dozens of individuals of both sexes have been found, and indeed occur in such abundance that many of the seedlings have been largely defoliated. Bright-yellow individuals of the common vaquita, *Diaprepes abbreviatus* L., are almost equally abundant, especially on the unshaded trees, and the combination of the two species constitutes a serious pest.

Several trees in the nursery are heavily infested with the common white scale of papaya, *Pseudalacaspis pentagona* (Targioni), and no predaceous ladybeetles have appeared spontaneously to check this outbreak.

The tender leaves of almendrón were noted last winter infested with two species of aphid: The green peach aphid, *Myzus persicae* (Sulzer), and in much greater abundance but causing no curling of the leaves, the spiraea aphid, *Aphis spiraeicola* Patch.⁵ No aphids have been noted during the spring, summer, and autumn, and even in the winter they are so scarce as to be of little economic importance.

George N. Wolcott
Department of Entomology